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STATE FOR AF/W B. BACHMAN - PLEASE PASS TO USAID AND PEACE
CORPS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [MARR](#) [EAID](#) [ASEC](#) [KPAO](#) [NG](#)
SUBJECT: NIGER: REQUESTS FROM ALL CORNERS FOR MORE U.S.
ENGAGEMENT

REF: NIAMEY 898

Classified By: Bernadette M. Allen, Ambassador; Reasons: 1.4 (a) and (d)
)

11. (C) Summary. Dialogue with Government of Niger (GON) officials (President, Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers), magistrates/judges, high commissioners, military commanders/police, both First Ladies (Pres. Tandja has two wives), regional leaders, parliamentarians, journalists, educators, women and youth, indicates that more U.S. engagement would be welcome in Niger in most every domain. Embassy contacts are taking note of the country team effort to visit all regions and are expressing great appreciation for our outreach activities, especially given the infrastructure challenges (i.e., deteriorating roads, lack of true rest stops in-between major cities and extremely modest accommodations) in this vast country. Across the land, there have been constant refrains for a return to the "good ole days" when U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) had a mission here, as well as requests for more cultural and professional exchanges, American corners, expert speakers, youth activities, women's empowerment programs and Peace Corps volunteers (PCVs). As it relates to military programs, Embassy team continues to raise the matter of Article 98 with relevant GON officials, though the GON civilians have not budged on that issue. On the law enforcement side, local police seek more training opportunities, particularly for urban centers (such as Maradi, Zinder and Niamey) that face increasing crime and smuggling of people and contraband (e.g., drugs, arms). The GON and grassroots organizations seek U.S. expertise and collaboration on programs to strengthen democratic institutions, reduce poverty, improve health/nutrition and engage with youth and women. Resources that provide the Embassy opportunities to partner and engage at the grassroots level are going a long way in accomplishing our objectives to strengthen institutions and democracy in this predominantly Muslim, democratic nation. End summary.

12. (U) In the face of deficient infrastructure and the great distances between Niamey and the regional capitals, executing an ambitious travel plan these past several months has allowed the Embassy team to feel the pulse of the Nigerien population. We have conducted extensive travel in the eight regions of Niger, even during the dry, dusty, hot month of May (with temperatures ranging from 120 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit). We have engaged in a range of cultural, educational, military-related, decentralization, re-integration, food security, health, women's and youth activities. Nigerien leaders and average citizens have expressed appreciation for our efforts and seek more U.S. know-how in their endeavors, far more than we can possibly

deliver given our resources. What appears to really resonate well across the country are projects that address the average citizen's fundamental needs: food security, health services, education and income-generation.

13. (C) In the area of anti-terrorism and anti-crime, military and police contacts in regions that are not the primary focal point of the Trans Sahel Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) have suggested that more attention needs to be focused to their regions. For example, officials in Diffa (some 1100 miles from Niamey and located in the easternmost region of the country bordering western Chad) have stressed that it is even more important for youth in regions far from the nation's capital to be exposed to American (or western) cultural activities to counter potential extremist influences emanating from northern Nigeria and western Chad. The Zone Commander that covers both Diffa and a portion of Agadez (most notably Bilma) is concerned about increased banditry and smuggling (cigarettes, arms, drugs), as well as increasing Chadian rebel activity along the Niger-Chad border. (Note: Bilma is the town that was devastated by floods in early September. The GON has announced it plans to rebuild after the rainy season ceases and GON officials, notably President Tandja and Prime Minister Amadoou, have indicated they may appeal for outside assistance to rebuild. End note.) Further, in a meeting chaired by the Governor of Diffa, the Zone Commander responsible for Diffa/northeastern Agadez, especially noted interest in hosting a military exercise in his region of responsibility and more training for officers under his command. While there appears to be regional government support in Diffa and other regions for such an exercise, the next step is securing the blessing of the GON leadership in the capital, Niamey.

14. (SBU) Infrastructure projects, humanitarian activities and youth-targeted programs funded through TSCTP, such as health clinics, rural radio stations and sports programs are huge hits. For example, while in Tahoua, the military, community leaders and women lauded the construction of a USG-funded maternity clinic, the first in the region. It serves both military wives and women in the local community at large. Classroom construction at a local school (also in Tahoua) is another success story and, as a result, enrollment has surpassed the new classroom capacity and the local community has erected thatched, open air structures (equivalent to the use of trailers at U.S. schools) to deal with overflow. The MEDCAP exercise remains the talk of the town in Tahoua, so much so, that local community leaders have inquired about the possibility of a return MEDCAP exercise, and leaders in other regions, have expressed interest in a similar MEDCAP exercise in their jurisdictions. In most every locale, there is great demand for more rural radio equipment and upgrades for radio stations (many operating with outdated reel-to-reel tapes from the 60's era that is increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to repair). These stations serve as the primary medium to inform and educate the population at large. Following the successful Military Information Support Team (MIST) sports caravan (reftel), we are being inundated with requests for more youth sports activities, for both genders. As a result of the Embassy team's outreach, more proposals that fall within the parameters of the Ambassador's Special Self-Help Fund (SSH) (i.e., women's agricultural gardens, cereal banks, libraries) and the Democracy and Human Rights Fund (i.e., decentralization-related workshops, re-integration programs) are flowing in at greater numbers. These projects are a lifeline to the communities. For example, in the town of Abalak in Agadez, community leaders noted the SSH-funded library is the first in the region and also will serve as a resource for schools in 12 neighboring villages.

15. (C) The military and police seek more training to enable their respective services to protect Niger's borders from the influx of criminal and extremist activity. In addition to concerns about ex-combatant Nigerien Tuaregs in the region of Agadez who may be influenced by rebel activity in eastern Mali, there is growing concern about Nigerien Toubou ex-rebels that may be influenced by Toubou rebel activity in

western Chad. GON civilian leaders (in Niamey) remain reluctant to allow the Nigerien military to host large training exercises that require what the civilians deem as too many boots on the ground. Military leaders, on the other hand, are eager to host as much training in country as the civilian government will allow or, preferably to participate in U.S.-based training, especially train-the-trainer programs. (Note: A draft GON budget published earlier this month in the Sahel, the GON official newspaper, conspicuously omitted funding for military services, a frustration for the military rank and file. It remains to be seen whether the final budget to be submitted to the National Assembly for approval will show a line item to cover military training or programs. End note.)

¶6. (SBU) Police commanders, in urban jurisdictions such as Niamey, have suggested a need to train elite police units in surveillance techniques to help them identify bad elements in the community, including some undocumented immigrants with uncertain agendas. Officials and community leaders in Zinder and Maradi are concerned as well about criminal and extremist influences emanating from northern Nigeria.

¶7. (U) Regional officials in Diffa and Zinder specifically cited the American Corners in Agadez and Maradi as resources they would like to see in their respective regions to engage and attract the attention of youth. More seminars and expert speakers are desired on a range of subjects: decentralization, AGOA, journalism, HIV/AIDS, etc. Regional and commune officials lament that resource constraints hinder communities from conducting more activities to engage youth.

¶8. (U) Nigeriens can't seem to get enough of the Peace Corps (PC) program. There are 120 PCVs covering several regions of the country (Tillebery, Dosso, Konni, Zinder, Maradi), yet these same regions are asking for more PCVs to provide assistance in the areas of agriculture, health and education. The Governor of Diffa inquired about hosting a few PCVs in his jurisdiction, to work on health issues, in schools and with women on vegetable gardens or other income-generating enterprises. The impact of the PCVs, who for the most part are required to conduct fund-raising activities, due to the lack of a dedicated funding scheme for their projects, is not

short of remarkable.

¶9. (U) There remains a great deal of nostalgia for the "good ole days" when USAID was a prominent institution in country. Officials at all levels of government, NGOs, grassroots organizations and citizens in general frequently ask whether USAID will open a new mission in Niger, and with the recent arrival of the USAID PSC employee, a hunger for broader USAID engagement is growing. The Kennedy Bridge, a USAID project of 36 years ago, still remains the example most frequently cited by Nigeriens in public speeches as symbolic of the strong U.S.-Nigerien friendship.

¶10. (U) In short, there are many program options available to partner with Nigeriens and they would be enthusiastic, willing partners with the U.S. Government, provided we can deliver the goods (i.e., funding or material resources). It is the Embassy's hope that the reforms envisioned by the Office of the Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance (F) will provide sufficient resources to sustain or further the transformational programs we are implementing with our partner in the global war on terrorism, the democratic, Muslim nation of Niger.

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